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ABSTRACT

As states have initiated educational reforms founded on standards-based education, teachers' roles have changed dramatically, shifting from the use of more structured textbook-driven instructional methods to more flexible, collaborative approaches. Teachers have implemented these changes with varying degrees of success. In this publication, teachers share their insights about their preparation to teach in a standards-based environment, about the resources and support needed to implement standards-based reform, and the impact of new accountability systems. Following an introduction to standards-based reform, chapters 2, 3, and 4 portray the real-life implications of the tenets of standards-based education from the teacher perspective using information from interviews with beginning and veteran teachers. Chapter 5 provides guidelines for supporting teachers' implementation of standards-based education, given what can be learned from teacher perspectives. Chapter 6 contains a discussion of how Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) plans to undertake midcourse review and analysis of standards-based education. An appendix lists milestones in the development of standards-based reform. (Contains 30 references.) (SLD)

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1
1 ..... Introduction

Chapter 2
5 ..... What Specifying Learning Goals Means for Teachers

Chapter 3
14 ..... What "Standards Apply to All Students" Means for Teachers

Chapter 4
21 ..... Assessment and Accountability

Chapter 5
32 ..... Supporting Teachers' Implementation of Standards-Based Education

Chapter 6
42 ..... Next Steps: On the Trail to a Midcourse Review

46 ..... References

49 ..... Appendix

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Why all the fuss about standards-based education? What is it? What does it mean for me and for my students? These are common questions that teachers ask about standards-based education for a number of reasons. In particular, they ask these questions to decide how much standards-based education differs from their current practice, to determine what changes they will have to make, and to judge whether the changes are worth the effort.

As we approach the 20th anniversary of the release of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a report often associated with the beginning of the standards movement, it might be reasonable to assume that standards-based education is well understood and commonplace in classrooms across the country. Research, surveys, and anecdotal evidence reviewed for this *Noteworthy*, however, show that teachers around the United States vary in their understanding and acceptance of standards-based education. Some teachers are angry, frustrated, and ready to reject standards-based education, while others have embraced it and have reaped benefits for their students and themselves.

Although some teachers reject standards-based education, many (two-thirds of those surveyed) acknowledge that standards have changed for the better the way education is delivered in their school ("Here to Stay," 1999). However, significantly fewer, only one-third

Chapter Summary

Standards-based education is the result of a call to action from political leaders, educators, and the American public to raise student achievement. As states have initiated reform, teachers' roles have changed dramatically, shifting from the use of more structured, textbook-driven instructional methods to more flexible, collaborative approaches. Teachers have implemented these changes with varying degrees of success. Here, teachers share their insights about their preparation to teach in a standards-based environment, about the resources and support needed to successfully implement standards-based reform, and about the impact of new accountability systems.

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of those surveyed in a recent study by the National Center for Education Statistics (Alexander, Heaviside, & Farris, 1998), say they are well prepared to implement higher standards. It is no surprise, then, that Public Agenda's "Reality Check 2000" concludes, "Talk about standards is ubiquitous, but teaching patterns often remain the same" (p. S-8).

There are multiple interpretations of what the outcomes of standards-based education should be and a variety of state approaches to standards-based reform. These approaches influence the actions that districts take (Regional Educational Laboratory Network, 2000). Throughout this publication, we'll see how these approaches, in turn, affect teachers' perceptions and actions.

State and district policymakers interviewed for the Regional Educational Laboratory Network study emphasized that standards-based reform requires a long-term commitment. Participants at the 1999 National Education Summit (Achieve, 1999) echoed that observation. They described the reform movement as at "a midway point." Although they agreed that "a lot of pieces are in place," they also acknowledged that it's time to get to "the heavy lifting of keeping standards in place, defining exactly what they mean, figuring out what happens if kids and educators don't meet standards, and providing the resources and support to help meet the standards" (p. 3).

As U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley (2000) noted in his annual state of American education address, it is important to have a "midcourse review and analysis to make sure everybody understands what the standards movement is all about." Such clarity is necessary to support teachers as they struggle with the realities of implementing standards in the classroom.

In the early days of the movement, standards seemed important because they provided learning goals for students and a measure against which to align various components of the education system (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, teacher preparation, and professional development). In addition, standards were intended to put the focus on what students learned rather than when they learned it. This shift in focus should allow teachers to more easily accommodate various learning styles and rates of learning. In this and other ways, it was hoped that standards would guide instructional practice and encourage teachers to use the most effective strategies. Today, although standards are still viewed as important because of the role they play in bringing consistency and coherence to many

This increased emphasis on accountability has had unforeseen and unwanted consequences for teaching and learning.

districts' education programs, standards are increasingly viewed as a means to hold students, teachers, and principals accountable.

This increased emphasis on accountability has had unforeseen and unwanted consequences for teaching and learning as evidenced by comments from teachers in this publication and relevant research studies.

Since *A Nation at Risk* was published, it has become clear that there is no "yellow brick road" to follow in making standards-based education a reality in the nation's classrooms. In fact, for teachers, the path is more like a partially developed hiking trail. There is a beginning and a destination that promises to take you to new heights. But the way is not easy, and it's best not to venture along the trail alone. There are

unexpected twists and turns. In some places, it's not clear where the trail is. Sometimes, in steep parts of the trail, you need a walking stick for support. There are easy and difficult parts all along the trail. Sometimes there's no view at all except of the trail ahead and who's by your side. You hope that if you just keep going, the views will be breathtaking and worth all the effort.

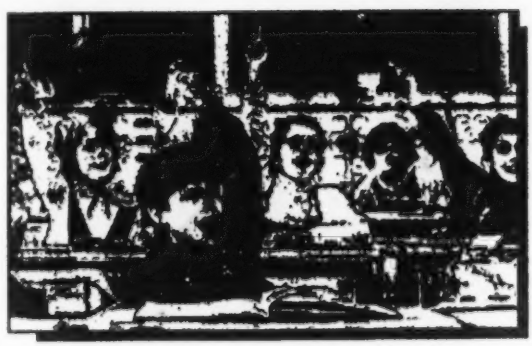
Although there are different conceptions of what the standards-based education "trail" is, there seems to be agreement on at least three major tenets:

1. Learning goals, called standards, are specified.
2. Standards apply to all students.
3. Assessment provides feedback about student performance relative to standards.

In chapters two, three, and four of this publication, the real-life implications of these tenets for teachers are portrayed from the teacher perspective. Stories and comments from teachers illustrate a variety of their concerns and struggles with implementation, as well as their increased understanding of effective teaching and positive changes in student learning. Chapter five provides guidelines for supporting teachers' implementation of standards-based education, given what we've learned from their perspectives. Chapter six presents a discussion of how McREL plans to undertake a midcourse review and analysis of standards-based education.

Information for this publication was gleaned from interviews that McREL conducted with beginning and veteran teachers across the United States who are engaged in standards-based reform efforts. McREL asked these teachers about their

understanding of standards-based education, if and how they are using a standards-based approach, what challenges they face in implementation, and what supports enable them to implement the approach effectively. In addition, McREL surveyed current research and literature on implementation of standards-based education and gathered data and anecdotal information from other studies regarding teachers' reactions to this reform. Together these investigations show a pattern of teacher responses that has relevance for school policymakers and administrators who are concerned about optimizing the implementation of standards-based reform in their districts.



Schools and districts engaged in standards implementation around the country have found that "if teachers are not informed and active participants in the process, reform efforts will fail" (Education Commission of the States, 1996, p. 15). The purpose of this publication is to help education administrators and policymakers understand what it takes for classroom teachers to implement standards-based education. With this understanding, they can give teachers the necessary support so that the promise of standards-based education – improved learning for all students – can be realized.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT SPECIFYING LEARNING GOALS MEANS FOR TEACHERS

The first tenet of standards-based education is that *learning goals, called standards, are specified.* Standards, simply defined, are statements of what students should know and be able to do. Is having specified learning goals a big change from current practice? Haven't teachers always had a clear idea of what their students should learn?

In a non-standards-based classroom, individual teachers may be clear about what they think their students should know, but it isn't necessarily the case that others teaching the same grade or course have the same ideas about what their students should learn. Some teachers decide what to teach by going through their textbooks from cover to cover. Others base their decisions on their own preferences and, in some cases, what they know best.

One purpose for the standards movement was to address this lack of articulation among teachers at the same grade level, within buildings, and across districts. As one teacher we interviewed noted:

> When I worked at the middle school in another district, it was interesting listening to teachers say, "This child came from this school, this child came from this [other] school." They could tell which schools focused more on reading, which ones focused more on writing, which ones focused more on just standardized types of tests. It was a pattern you could really see. But by using standards-based education and the standards and benchmarks we created for our district, it will hopefully be aligned, and it's not going to matter what 3rd grade classroom the child was in.

Chapter Summary

Teachers must have opportunities to learn about standards and to understand the need for change. When teachers are involved in the process of developing and implementing standards, they experience less frustration and resentment. Once they begin implementing standards-based instruction, many teachers come to recognize the benefits—focused curriculum and increased awareness of student learning.

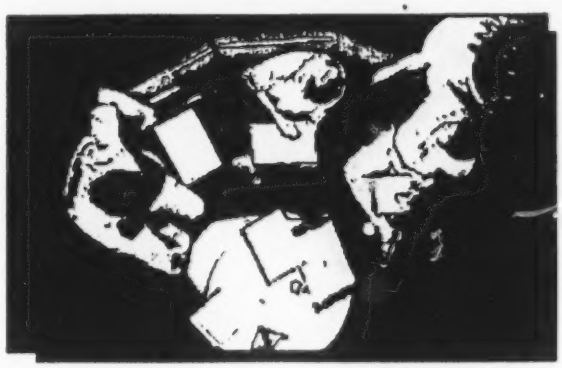
Even though some teachers appreciate the consistency that standards can bring to a district's education program, many do not know about this benefit or do not appreciate its implications. Before they commit time and energy to making the shift to standards-based education, they need to understand what standards-based education is all about. They also need concrete reasons for making the shift.

Building Understanding of Standards-Based Education

The first step in any reform process is to ensure that the people responsible for the change, in this case teachers, understand and support the changes to be made. Helping teachers understand the big picture of standards-based education is critical. Teachers we interviewed emphasized that an essential factor in understanding the big picture of standards is connecting this reform to the larger vision of their schools or districts. It may be difficult to do so, however, because, as one teacher pointed out, district mission statements are often "fluffy, nebulous things, while the content standards are very specific. . . and they don't match." She added that content standards often do not match a district's prescribed textbooks for the curriculum, making it "tricky" to teach to the standards, especially when alternate resources are not available.

. . .an essential factor in understanding the big picture of standards is connecting this reform to the larger vision of their schools or districts.

This teacher's comments highlight one of the main tasks of shifting to a standards-based system – aligning all of the elements of the system (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, teacher evaluation, resource allocation) around standards. Understanding the big picture of standards-based education means understanding this alignment.



Many teachers said that to grasp the meaning of standards-based education, they need to be told in concrete terms what it is all about and what it means in terms of classroom practice. As one elementary teacher noted:

> [Standards-based education] didn't mean a darn thing because I had no idea what I was supposed to do with it. I sat there [when the administrator explained the role of standards] and nodded my head and said, "Um hum, sure."

Many teachers we interviewed said they do not feel invested in standards-based education because they have not been personally involved in the development process. Few teachers were directly involved in state standards-setting efforts. Even at the district level, the number of teachers directly involved in developing standards may have been limited depending on the size of the district and the standards-setting process used. There are at least two major consequences of this limited involvement: resentment and lack of knowledge about standards documents.

Teachers want to be involved in standards development in meaningful ways, not just as members of "rubber stamp" committees after the standards development process is essentially complete.

The first consequence, resentment, arises because teachers feel they did not have input into the process. They view standards as something imposed by the state or the district. This is particularly true for state standards because the "rank and file" teacher is often unaware of the state standards development process and the role that teachers played in it.

If few teachers are involved in the standards development process, then most teachers will not be familiar with what is in the standards documents. Unfortunately, as illustrated by comments made by one teacher, the importance of structured opportunities to thoroughly examine and discuss the content of standards documents is not always recognized by those leading the standards-based reform effort in a district:

> Teachers have been given copies of the standards and benchmarks, but it's been very much "look at these, see how they line up with what you're doing."

Such tactics downplay the importance of standards and make it difficult for teachers to understand that standards are intended to serve as the organizing point for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Teachers say the message sent is that standards are just one more program to be added on to a myriad of other programs.

Teachers want to be involved in standards development in meaningful ways, not just as members of "rubber stamp" committees after the standards development process is essentially complete. One teacher who served on such a committee admitted that this limited involvement did nothing to encourage her to incorporate standards in her classroom. She added, "Without putting personal time and energy into the development process, many teachers will not feel ownership." As an example, she described how a standards-based curriculum prepared by a well-respected team of district administrators had been basically ignored by three-quarters of the teachers at her school.

As teachers begin to examine state and district standards documents, other problems may surface, and frustration may follow. One such problem is related to confusion over various types of standards. Particularly in the early days of the standards movement, many people were not clear about the distinctions between content standards, curriculum standards, and performance standards. Opportunity-to-learn standards, program standards, and teaching standards were often thrown into the mix as well. As a result, some national-level standards documents (on which many state documents were based) were a mix of several types of standards.

As districts developed their own documents, standards were similarly mixed and written at varying levels of specificity. For example, in addition to standards (i.e., broad statements of knowledge that students should acquire by the time they graduate), most districts also specified benchmarks (i.e., statements of what standards look like at various developmental levels such as 4th grade or 8th grade). In some cases, benchmarks may have been called by another name (e.g., proficiencies, checkpoints, critical learnings, expectations, and demonstrations) or these labels may have been applied to provide an additional level of specificity. Teachers who became tangled in the web of translation expressed frustration with the different labels used in state and district documents. This alone has been enough to discourage some teachers from participating in or supporting activities related to the implementation of standards.

". . .it is important for the district to have a common vocabulary and to provide opportunities for teachers to understand what the various terms mean.

The specific vocabulary that is used in a district is not critical, but it is important for the district to have a common vocabulary and to provide opportunities for teachers to understand what the various terms mean.

In Wyoming, for example, the state standards document includes content standards, benchmarks, and performance level descriptions. In one district whose standards document had been developed before the state document, all of the statements were labeled as performance standards. When the district had to align its standards with the state's, confusion and anger reigned as teachers tried to decide how to accomplish the match. After a somewhat heated debate during a faculty meeting, the teachers decided to reorganize their document and adopt

the state's vocabulary. At the time, some were unhappy about "bowing" to the state, but as they got further along with implementation, they were happy they had made the decision.

Teachers experience other frustrations with state and district standards documents as well. For example, some benchmarks are written in a vague way (e.g., "explore the diversity of living things"). Others are too specific (e.g., "identify the common pathogenic micro-organisms"). In some cases benchmarks don't make sense to many teachers because they contain current education jargon (e.g., "create mental images from pictures and print"). Such technical problems make it more difficult for teachers to organize curriculum, instruction, and assessment around standards (Paynter, 1998).

Understanding the Need for Change

At least initially, many teachers are skeptical about the need for standards, in part because as one teacher noted, teachers may view standards as just one more change that will be short-lived and accomplish little:

> People who've been around awhile say, "I've seen a million of these things come and go, and this one's going to go too, so I'm not going to put any energy into it."

A New York teacher reported that many teachers in her school have a certain degree of disregard for standards-based education:

> In my department there are teachers who have been teaching for a long time. They've seen a lot of different curriculums, they've seen a lot of different things the state has enforced, and I think some of them are viewing this as, "This is just going to be here for a few years and then they'll just change it and want something different." Then they'll say this didn't work.

Another teacher summed up the frustration and confusion felt by many of her colleagues around the United States:

> Initially [I thought], "Here's one more thing!" These standards [documents] straggled in. I didn't know what I was supposed to do with them... I thought it was going to be another huge waste of time.

Another veteran teacher noted that many of her colleagues feel that standards are "going to go away, that this is a phase... that [teachers] can just keep on doing what they're doing and not be held accountable."

Convincing teachers of the need for change is particularly difficult if they feel they have been successful under the old system. As a New York teacher put it:

> There are some teachers who've been teaching for many, many years and have had successful students up to this point. I don't think they see a need for change.

These comments are the voice of experience. Teachers keep doing what has worked in the past and only adopt new practices if they are

convinced that new practices will help them better serve students. The role of those leading standards-based reform is to help teachers understand how new practices improve student learning.

Sometimes teachers see no reason to change because there is no pressure to do so. As one teacher noted, internal consequences would make a great difference in helping people understand that they must get serious about standards:

> There is no reporting out yet by standards or benchmarks, even internally. Without reporting, there are no consequences, so some may think, "Why bother?"

Another reason teachers are reluctant to change is that they think standards-based education is not essentially different from traditional instruction.

Teachers we interviewed repeatedly characterized standards as "nothing new" or as just a matter of new terminology. As one teacher summed up, "I've been doing it for years. They just didn't call it standards driven." Said another, "So many things come and go and then it comes back as another name. I think, 'Oh, so this is basically what we did a few years ago; we're just calling it this now'" (Education Commission of the States, 1996, p. 9).

Many teachers resist change because they question whether there will be significant benefits for their students, especially when there are

Teachers we interviewed repeatedly characterized standards as "nothing new" or as just a matter of new terminology.

people inside and outside education who speak about standards-based education as something that is unproven. Teachers need convincing evidence – success stories – that standards-based education will improve student learning.

Getting Started with Standards

Many teachers we interviewed said they came to realize the enormity of the changes needed to implement standards, as the following teacher's comments exemplify:

> I thought, "Okay, now let me just sit down and really think about what I'm being asked to do here, and what I need to do, and how that is different from what I've already done." And basically I found out. . . I just have to restructure everything I'm already doing, and it will all fall into place.

Many teachers, like one veteran teacher we interviewed, say that getting started with standards is stressful and confusing:

> When I first started with the standards and benchmarks, I was clueless. . . I can relate with teachers who have not experienced the terms "standards" and "benchmarks" and other teachers who are pretending those terms don't exist. At the very beginning, there might have been a little bit of fear, a little apprehension because I didn't understand what was going on.

Despite her initial confusion, this teacher was very excited about learning exactly what the standards meant and how they aligned. She wanted to hear what other teachers were saying about the standards and how she could use them to better educate her students. The good news is that this teacher, and many others, said that with time they became more comfortable with standards and the changes that they bring:

> As I started to learn more what the standards and benchmarks were, I felt comfortable – and do feel comfortable with them now – and am implementing them in my classroom.

Teachers are frustrated because they feel they do not get reliable information when they need it.

Incomplete or mixed messages from the state or district heightened teachers' stress and sense of the enormity of the changes required. They are unsure what standards-based education will require of them and their students because the message seems to change daily. Often this is unavoidable because policy is evolving. In a study by Grant (2000), one teacher related a story that illustrates this situation:

> When we go to state meetings, (the New York State Education Department representative) who's in the math ed department always prefaces his remarks with, "What I'm going to tell you is true on May 13th at 4 whatever. It's true right now. When I go back to my office, it might not be true."

Teachers are frustrated because they feel they do not get reliable information when they need it. Often critical information comes too late, or it is inaccurate. Sometimes, teachers simply do not know that it is available. In Wyoming, for example, before the first state assessment, sample items were posted on the department of education's Web site. Even though districts were notified, many teachers did not know these samples were available until after their students had performed poorly on the assessment.

Why Teachers Like Standards

Many teachers reported recognizing that there are benefits to implementing standards. For example, one teacher talked about how standards have helped focus the district's efforts to ensure that all students have the opportunities they need to learn the required knowledge and skills:

> [Before standards] I had the curriculum, and I used that somewhat. But, basically, I did what I thought was important. And, again, that is why I am so pro-standards, because what I think is important may not be what you think is important and so everybody gets a different education.

> Focus is the most important thing. Philosophically, I really believe in implementing standards, just because it provides a focus for people across the district. It's given everybody a common ground to work from. . . making education equal across a large district like [ours].

The idea of focus as a result of standards was echoed by many teachers, like the teacher who characterized standards-based education as a "blueprint" that has given her a clearer focus on what she is supposed to teach:

> I know where I'm going [and] it's made me a better teacher because I actually have to think about what I'm going to do. . . It's made me think harder about my lessons to make sure that I have more appropriate resources, as opposed to just looking in the teacher's guide.

This teacher also feels that under standards-based education, administrators trust her to make appropriate decisions about curricular materials. She no longer feels that the textbook has to be the sole source of information or activities. She knows that *how* students acquire the knowledge specified in standards is not as important as that they *do* acquire the knowledge. This gives her a sense of freedom and makes her feel more professional:

> It means that [administrators] are trusting me to be able to design curriculum. They're saying, "Here are the standards, but you design the curriculum that you need, that you know will fit your urban students."

An additional benefit she notes is that students are aware of the learning goals. This awareness focuses students' attention and leads to improved learning:

> You can ask one kid, "Why did you do this particular project?" He'll tell you the perfect answer. And then you go to someone else who says, "I don't know. Because [the teacher] wanted me to."
>
> Now I have far [fewer] children who say, "Because [the teacher] wanted me to." That content standard is up there all the time and it gets referred to.

Some teachers noted that standards often put boundaries around the expectations they have for themselves, as well as the expectations others have of them. Standards allow them to prioritize. Said one teacher:

> I don't have time to do things that aren't necessary for my kids, and so I use the standards and benchmarks to make sure that what I'm doing is truly what I'm supposed to be doing.

Despite their initial misgivings and frustrations, many teachers report that over time they have come to appreciate standards, in part because they see how standards can be used to map instruction. One California teacher summed up what many others said about organizing teaching around standards:

> It's a good thing for the teacher because you [do not] have just a collection of lessons. You have to have a specific purpose for [each lesson]. It helps keep you focused with all these little kids who need to be focused. They need to know why they're doing things.

Although some teachers view standards-based education as just another name for what they've always done, others recognize that standards

represent a systematically different approach to teaching and learning:

> It's just a switch in the way I work. I think "standards" first now, before I plan a lesson, before I do anything. I think, "Okay, which standard or which checkpoint [benchmark] does this hit?. . ." That's not to say that I'm totally tied to standards. There are some things that I think are important to be taught, [although] it's not a checkpoint, and so I just go ahead and teach that anyway. But, I always think. . . checkpoints first.

One teacher's success with standards-based education is best expressed in the story of a 3rd grade student who had recently moved to the district. Although he had not been identified as a special education student, his skill level was significantly below grade level; he was a non-reader:

> He couldn't spell his last name [Jones]. He couldn't say his ABCs; he couldn't write his numbers past 10; he didn't understand [that] a sentence went from left to right. Now, since he's been in my class, he can spell "Jones." He can write a story that makes sense – that has a beginning, middle, and an end – and he reads at 1st grade level.

As this teacher explained, focusing her instruction on reading and writing standards and using the instructional practices she learned as part of her district's literacy initiative helped her improve this student's learning.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT "STANDARDS APPLY TO ALL STUDENTS" MEANS FOR TEACHERS

Standards apply to all students means that regardless of special needs or background, all students should experience a curriculum that gives them the opportunity to reach the high standards that have been set by the state, the district, or both. Sometimes in a non-standards-based system, different students experience different curricula. Often, students of color or students with special needs are overrepresented in the groups that do not experience a rich and rigorous curriculum. Less is offered to them, less is expected of them, and as a result, these students often achieve less. The intent of the second tenet of standards-based education is to change this inequitable aspect of the non-standards-based system.

To ensure that all students have the opportunity to reach high standards, teachers must know a variety of instructional strategies and be able to use them appropriately. Although a standards-based approach does not dictate specific instructional practices, the need to help all students meet standards, which require deeper levels of understanding, has led many teachers to alter their strategies. The complexity of teaching in a standards-based system is highlighted in the following description from Wilson and Ball (1996):

> [Teachers] must help their students meet the standards for learning outcomes, preparing them for much more open-ended and ambiguous assessments that examine at a much finer level, what students have learned. They must demonstrate, select, and design good classroom learning tasks, teach more complex content to deeper levels of understanding, and cover the curriculum. They must conduct productive classroom discussions,

Chapter Summary

"All students can learn" is a basic tenet of standards-based education. Teachers say they need better definitions and examples of standards-based practices and how to translate the standards into effective instruction, particularly when it comes to students with special needs. If the potential of standards-based education is to be realized, these students also must be challenged with high expectations.

> attend to students' understanding, effectively manage the classroom, use new forms of assessment, and help all of their students achieve. (p. 122)

Certainly Wilson and Ball believe that standards were intended to emphasize complex content and require students to develop deeper levels of understanding than is often the case in non-standards-based systems. To learn complex content and develop deeper levels of understanding, most students must be actively engaged with the content. This generally means using complex reasoning skills such as comparing, classifying, constructing support, analyzing relationships, problem solving, decision making, and experimental inquiry.

Wilson and Ball characterize the type of teaching that is required to help students acquire deep understanding of complex content as "undetermined and uncertain" because how students will respond when engaged in such activities is not as clearly defined as when they merely have to listen to a lecture, take notes, and "parrot" what the teacher said. When the goal is deeper understanding of complex content, the teacher must be skilled at interpreting what student responses indicate about the student's level of knowledge. The teacher must know the subject matter – and students' difficulties learning it – well enough to recognize what their comments mean in terms of what they know, their misconceptions as well as their insights, and what she or he can do to further their learning.

The shift from the teacher as the main actor in the classroom to the student as active learner is not an easy one. Many teachers have to change their beliefs about what teachers do and what students do. For example, most teachers are quick to supply "the answer" when students are confused or struggling. They see their job as "helper." They also have a strong sense of obligation to cover the curriculum. In cases where the curriculum is defined by what is presented in a textbook, the curriculum can be very broad. As a result, teachers feel that they cannot spend too much time on any one topic. To acquire deeper understanding, however, students may need to spend an extended period of time on a topic or a specific problem. Of course, under the "new view" of teaching, that problem is likely to push students' thinking rather than structure it to help them avoid making mistakes (Wilson & Ball, 1996).

When the goal is deeper understanding of complex content, the teacher must be skilled at interpreting what student responses indicate about the student's level of knowledge.

It is often difficult for teachers to give up the old view of teaching. For example, the 1996-1997 RAND survey in Kentucky (Stecher, Barron, Kaganoff, & Goodwin, 1998) found that teachers believed students should be allowed to solve mathematics problems on their own. On the other hand, they also supported giving students step-by-step instructions and immediately correcting

students' errors, which might keep some students from solving problems independently. Part of the difficulty may be in teachers' conceptions of "problem solving." For many mathematics teachers, solving problems means using a known procedure on a typical word problem. The vision of problem solving in the mathematics standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics encompasses a variety of problems – including open-ended and ill-defined problems. To help students meet the standard on problem solving, then, teachers must give students the opportunity to solve such problems. This is not likely if teachers have not themselves had experience with these problems.

Interviews with teachers indicated that they are often confused about which instructional practices are standards-based and which are not. This may reflect the fact that while standards-based education does not dictate particular instructional strategies, certain strategies are often associated with it because they lead to deeper understanding of complex content. Some districts may have introduced particular strategies, such as cooperative learning, interdisciplinary teaching, journal writing, and open-ended discussions to help teachers increase students' chances of being successful in the standards-based system. Because the new strategies were introduced at the same time that standards implementation efforts began, for many teachers these instructional strategies become defining characteristics of standards-based education.

Interviews with teachers indicated that they are often confused about which instructional practices are standards-based and which are not.

Although for some teachers a standards-based approach represents a major departure from the way they are accustomed to teaching, for others it is a continuation of practices they have found effective for many years. One teacher we interviewed, when asked if she was using different teaching strategies since introducing content standards into her classes, said, "I don't believe so. I think I'm still teaching the same way that I always have been." Later this teacher talked about the various strategies that she used. These strategies included oral assessment, open-ended questions, rubrics, and ongoing assessment of individual student progress to guide instruction. Although such strategies are more common in standards-based systems than non-standards-based systems, there are teachers who were using these strategies long before their districts began to implement standards. Thus, they may not see standards-based instruction as a different form of instruction.

Most teachers want more concrete examples and demonstrations to help them understand how to use instructional practices that help students meet standards. They need more "step-by-step" examples of how to delve deeper into standards and benchmarks to determine the knowledge and skills they require of students. As one teacher

said, "If you don't translate [the standards], they won't be used." When teachers understand what the standards mean, they can design instruction to target that knowledge, using a variety of materials and instructional strategies. Some teachers are focusing on the need for more cross-curriculum

When teachers understand what the standards mean, they can design instruction to target that knowledge.

interaction. This is particularly important for standards that span academic disciplines, a situation that is more prevalent in the higher grades. "If you have a project in applied biology or chemistry," one teacher said, "[students] might report their findings and that [reporting] is more appropriately taught in English class."

Changing Expectations of Who Can Learn

What may be different about standards-based education for some teachers is the expectation that their teaching should help all students aim for achieving high standards. This idea has been captured in a phrase often associated with standards-based education: "All students can learn." Most teachers we interviewed generally agreed that all students can learn and that it is important to have high expectations. However, like the Maryland teacher whose comments follow, they were often skeptical about all children being able to reach the same high standards.

> I don't think there's any doubt that we all believe that all children can learn, but whether or not all children can take physics or pass Algebra II is another thing. Are you expecting the same thing from all children? No. But if you expect that all children can learn, can progress, then certainly. (ECS, 1996, p.12)

In a study involving Philadelphia teachers, almost one-third of the teachers agreed that many of their students simply were not able to learn the material taught (Simon, Foley, & Passantino, 1998). Similarly, a 1996-97 RAND survey (Stecher et al., 1998) of Kentucky mathematics and writing teachers found that a significant percentage of both math and writing teachers held the view that there are some students who will never perform above the minimum level of achievement. Among 4th grade writing teachers, for example, two-thirds

agreed with the statement, "With appropriate instruction, all students can become successful writers" (p. 56). By 7th grade, however, the percentage had decreased to 48 percent.

Teachers we interviewed often cited factors outside their control (e.g., student attitude, low

socioeconomic status, lack of parental support, poor study habits) as reasons that their students did not achieve. Some teachers have decided, however, that they can no longer use these factors as reasons for not improving student achievement. As one 1st grade teacher who teaches a large percentage of non-English speaking students said:

> Saying that not all children can learn is just an excuse. You need to look at how you are teaching. You need to reflect on your teaching and what you are doing. Are you meeting the needs of the children? Such teachers look carefully at their instruction to see what they are and aren't doing to help students learn. They participate in professional development to learn new strategies and then monitor the use of those strategies to make certain they lead to improved teaching and learning.

Teachers' beliefs about students' inability to learn are often based on past experience with students who enter their classes with skills considerably below grade level. Most teachers find it extremely difficult to make significant improvements in student achievement when the student begins with low skills. To make such improvements, the teacher must be able to accurately evaluate and continually monitor the student's skill level and provide appropriate, and possibly individualized, instruction for the student. Both of these actions are consistent with standards-based education.

Wagner (1998) notes that there must be significant and compelling reasons for teachers to change their views of who should succeed. For some teachers, high-stakes assessment provides the motivation to help all students learn (Dailey & Zantal-Wiener, 2000). For others, a focus on helping their students produce quality work, a goal of standards-based education, helps to change their beliefs about who can succeed (Wheelock, 1998).

Concerns About Standards and Students with Special Needs

Many teachers voiced particular concern about the ability of students in special education to meet high standards and perform well on assessments. This may explain why just 28 percent of teachers surveyed for the Status of Education Reform report (Alexander et al., 1998) claimed to apply the same high standards of performance to special education students as to other students. Barely one third said they applied the same standards to students with limited English proficiency. Thirty-one percent of the teachers who understood the concept of standards-based instruction and how to apply it said they needed more information on helping students with disabilities to achieve high standards.

Many teachers voiced particular concern about the ability of students in special education to meet high standards and perform well on assessments.

In a study of 10 high schools representative of schools across the country, both general and special education teachers reported that they had little guidance from states or districts on how to include

students with disabilities in standards-based reform (Dailey & Zantal-Wiener, 2000). Further, these teachers had few opportunities for the types of interaction that would have allowed general education teachers to share what they know about content and standards and for special education teachers to share what they know about students with disabilities. As one teacher's comments highlight, special education teachers are often not included or taken seriously in professional development related to standards-based education:

> The inservices do not include anyone who knows about students with disabilities. It's unreal to me. They responded to general education teachers in a serious and helpful way. No one can answer questions about students with disabilities. (Dailey & Zantal-Wiener, 2000, p. 26)

Although teachers and administrators said that students with disabilities "are best served in a standards-based curriculum in general education" (Dailey & Zantal-Wiener, p. 8), the needed resources and other organizational supports often are not provided.

Dailey and Zantal-Wiener (2000) found that special education teachers did not know how to align Individual Education Plans with standards. Part of the difficulty may be that like general education teachers, special education teachers need time to understand exactly what knowledge and skills are in the standards. For special education teachers, the problem is more complex because they may need to analyze the benchmarks at a deeper level to determine the prerequisite or underlying knowledge and skills that lead up to them. To do this, Sue Bechard, a special education expert formerly with the Colorado Department of Education, suggests that teachers first look at the targeted benchmarks for the students' grade level and ask, "How can we support the special needs student with the same curriculum provided to all students?"

Bechard also emphasizes that it is important for teachers who work with students with special needs to have a clear understanding of the underlying concepts to be taught. She explains that having a deep understanding of the concepts helps teachers find creative and diverse ways to get to the instructional goal:

> For example, the concept of gravity can be demonstrated with rockets or by dropping something from different heights. The difficulty comes in putting together the resources and materials for students operating at different levels. As with standards-based education in general, developing these materials takes time.

Because language, physical, mental, or emotional challenges may prevent students with special needs from being able to work under the same conditions as other students, accommodations or modifications must sometimes be made. Accommodations, such as using Braille for a visually impaired student, says Bechard, are methods of "leveling the playing field." With accommodations, the *how* of performance is changed, not the level of expectation.

Modifications, on the other hand, affect

performance expectation levels. An example of a modification is reducing the amount of work required of a student with learning disabilities. The student would still be required to do a similar type of work, but the benchmark might be different.

According to Dailey and Zantal-Wiener (2000), most general and special educators do not know how to accommodate instruction or design modifications that are appropriate for helping students meet standards. Bechard suggests that teachers follow guidelines prepared by the National Center for Educational Outcomes (Bruininks et al., 1991) to determine appropriate accommodations. These guidelines recommend that teachers consider the following:

1. *Presentation of the materials*
   What is the best way to use them for a particular student?
2. *Demonstration of knowledge*
   What is the most effective way for this student to demonstrate his or her knowledge (e.g., dictations, writing, graphic organizers, productions, videos, and skits)?
3. *Scheduling and timing*
   Should the assignment be broken into smaller chunks? Should progress be checked at the end of every week instead of at the end of a semester?

Teachers report needing additional support to include students with special needs in standards-based reform. They say the resource gap affects their ability to tailor instruction to meet the individual needs of all students. Some states have provided additional support for including students with special needs in standards-based reform by holding tutoring sessions outside school hours, establishing family resource or youth services centers, and running pre-kindergarten programs (Regional Educational Laboratory Network, 1998a).

A Goals 2000 committee studying the inclusion of children with disabilities in school reform assessed the extent to which the goals of standards-based education and those of individualized instruction that characterizes special education could be reconciled. Although the committee found "a scarcity of research evidence directly bearing on the effects of standards-based reforms. . . on students with disabilities" (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997, p. 2), it agreed that even students in special education should have access to challenging standards. It also agreed that policymakers and educators should be held publicly accountable for the performance of all students. Moreover, in the short term at least, it found that the integration of standards for students with disabilities will be hindered by "a shortage of financial and professional resources. Even with additional resources, some of the elements needed to integrate all students with disabilities fully into standards-based reform may exceed the limits of current knowledge and technology" (p. 2).

CHAPTER 4

ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The third tenet of standards-based education, *assessment provides feedback about student performance relative to standards,* is a response to an issue that standards-based education was designed to address – the overemphasis on what goes into the process of schooling (e.g., pupil expenditures, class size, teacher salaries, and age of buildings and equipment) as opposed to what students get out of the process (i.e., learning). This shift in emphasis does not imply that inputs are not important, but rather that student learning (the output) should be the primary focus of the education system. Inputs are important to the extent that they affect student learning and should be examined in terms of how they contribute to that result.

As mentioned in chapter three, standards require that students have deeper levels of knowledge about content matter and are able to apply that knowledge. Typical multiple-choice questions, true-false items, and fill-in-the blank assessment methods are not adequate for assessing this type of knowledge and its application. For this reason, performance assessments are generally associated with standards-based education. Although special education, vocational education, and fine arts teachers have used performance assessments routinely, most core subject teachers have not. Thus, standards-based education requires that many teachers learn how to use a broad array of assessment methods and that they learn how to more closely match assessment methods to learning targets.

Chapter Summary

New methods of teaching and learning require new methods of assessment that are appropriate for the knowledge and complex reasoning skills now expected of students. Teachers, schools, districts, and states are struggling to develop assessments that are fair, meaningful, and aligned with learning targets and other assessments. They must also fit into accountability systems, which are an increasingly important piece of the standards puzzle.

. . .multiple methods of assessment are used at different times to determine students' levels of knowledge and skill.

Proponents of performance assessments believe that "authentic" (or real world) measures of performance will lead to "more effective instructional practices and will foster children's conceptual understanding" (Stecher et al., 1998, p. 2). Many states and districts demonstrate their belief in this statement by instituting assessments tied to standards. In fact, in the early days of the standards movement – and even today – it was quite common to hear the phrase "assessment drives instruction." The idea was that teachers would pay attention to standards if they knew students would be tested on them. As we'll see from teachers' comments in this chapter, assessment may drive instruction, but not always in the way intended.

Assessment in a Standards-Based System

It is increasingly recognized that no one method can uncover the full range of students' knowledge and that different students may need to show their knowledge in different ways (e.g., produce a video, make a presentation, or write a research paper). Thus, in a standards-based system, multiple methods of assessment are used at different times to determine students' levels of knowledge and skill. Among these methods are performance tasks, portfolios, journals, learning logs, observations, and interviews. The key to these demonstrations of knowledge is that they require students to construct a response rather than select one from among those provided.

In a standards-based system, in addition to teachers evaluating student performance, students are expected to use criteria to judge the quality of their own work. One of the goals of the self-assessment process is to help students learn to reflect on and describe their progress. Students know in advance what criteria they need to meet and are provided with examples of high-quality work. Regardless of who makes the judgment about the level of students' performance, a primary goal of assessment in a standards-based system is to provide students with information about their performance that will help them improve.

One of the goals. . . is to help students learn to reflect on and describe their progress.

To use assessment to help students improve their learning, teachers should consider assessment as the core of their practice. The following comments from one Colorado teacher illustrate this idea and several others in the preceding paragraphs:

> A lot of my assessments are like pieces of instruction. For example, if I'm conferencing with a student on her ability to understand characterizations or dialogue. . . that's a form of assessment. Then I use whatever that student says to either reteach or take it to the next level. So, [for me] assessment and instruction are so

> closely tied that, for the most part. . . I see them as being almost inseparable.

Before adopting a standards-based approach, this teacher used a more informal approach to assessment. As she explained, now she purposefully looks for and documents evidence of learning:

> The process was more in my head – I know this person can do this. But, really, if I had to prove it to you, I probably wouldn't have had decent proof. And now I'm starting to really look at what is decent proof.

This teacher's standards-based approach is so pervasive that she has instilled her students with its expectations, leading to success stories such as the following:

> The first thing that I do is make the kids take ownership for a piece of work. . . It takes a while for them to. . . understand that their job is to prove to me they can do these things. It's my job to help them get there, but getting the kids to own their work as opposed to [thinking of it as] a piece of my work has really helped me with the workload. Students start picking things out from lessons saying, "Oh, this would work for Checkpoint (benchmark) 4. Can I put this in my Body of Evidence?" When you hear a kid say that, you think, "Okay, we're getting there!"

Another characteristic of assessment in a standards-based system is the requirement that teachers carefully match methods of assessment to learning targets. Teachers must understand the type of knowledge (i.e., specific information, in-depth understanding of complex ideas, speed and accuracy in using a skill, or mastery of a complex process) so they can select appropriate assessments. If the knowledge is specific information such as facts, terms, or details, then selected response items (i.e., multiple-choice, true-false, or matching) may be appropriate. When the target involves complex ideas such as concepts, generalizations, or principles, then constructed response modes (e.g., performance tasks, exhibitions, writing samples, problem solving, or interviews) are more appropriate. In a standards-based system, teachers need to have a broad repertoire of assessment strategies and know how to purposefully select (or guide students to select) those that will allow students to provide evidence of their learning.

In keeping with the philosophy that standards apply to all students, assessment also extends to students with special needs. In the past, it was common to exclude students with special needs from district and state assessments. The intent of including all students in assessments in a standards-based system is the same – to determine their level of performance relative to standards. To teachers, however, this philosophical purpose clashes with the effects that district, and, in

particular, state assessments have on students with special needs.

Teachers we interviewed said it is troubling that students with special needs are included in high-stakes assessments. Such examinations, said one teacher, run the risk of discouraging students in special education who cannot make the grade:

> I've already had students [in special education] this year saying, "Wow, by giving us this exam, that means they want us to drop out." These kids cannot read and write well enough to pass this exam at this stage. I think this has been a big problem for the state and an issue the state is going to have to deal with, as will educators. What's going to happen to these kids?

The issue at the district level is sometimes less troublesome because performance levels and/or standards are modified for these students. For example, rather than meeting the "proficient" level of performance, students with special needs might be required to meet the "basic" level of performance. Another approach is to analyze the standards and benchmarks for the underlying or prerequisite information and skills, which then become the focus of instruction for students with special needs. In this way, students in special education are working toward the same standards as other students, but beginning at a more appropriate level.

It may be necessary to provide accommodations for students with special needs to participate in assessment to ensure that scores reflect levels of knowledge rather than the effect of the disability. By law, students with disabilities are entitled to such accommodations. Examples of accommodations include providing a voice-activated device or recorder to "record" the answers of a student who may lack the motor skills to hold a pencil, or providing a test in Braille for a sight-impaired student. Students in special education also may require some extra time to complete assessments. States may provide guidelines to help teachers understand the types of accommodations and modifications that are allowed on state tests, but teachers still say they do not fully understand which accommodations and modifications are appropriate.

Experts caution that accommodations for students with special needs should not interfere with obtaining a true measure of students' performance.

Experts caution that accommodations for students with special needs should not interfere with obtaining a true measure of students' performance. As stated in *Educating One and All* (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997), in some cases, "it is not clear how accommodations, such as an oral reader, may affect the construct being measured" (p. 7).

Teachers also say that it's not fair to require students in special education to take standardized or state tests when their skill levels are so obviously below grade level. As one teacher said,

> If I have an 8th grade student who is reading on a 2nd grade level, why should he have to take

the 8th grade reading test? It's ridiculous! I know he's not going to pass. He knows he's not going to pass. It is very discouraging for the student and it doesn't tell me anything about what he knows. If I want to know how much he knows, then I should give him the 2nd grade test. But the state says I have to give him the 8th grade test. I can't just keep giving him tests.

Aligning Assessment at Different Levels

Teachers expressed more concern about assessment than any other issue related to standards-based education. Part of the difficulty arises because assessment serves multiple purposes. Two primary ways that teachers use assessment data are (1) to determine if they need to adjust instruction for individuals or groups of students and (2) to assign grades. Among the reasons states and districts are interested in assessment data are to evaluate programs and to monitor school performance. National, state, and district assessments are generally "snapshots" at given points in time. They may not be closely connected with a school's curriculum. Thus, they are not useful for some purposes, such as guiding instruction or making good inferences about the depth of individual student learning.

Problems result when assessments used at the classroom level and assessments at the state level, district level, or both send different messages about the type of learning that is valued. If high stakes for teachers or students are attached to one or both levels of assessment, then the problems are compounded.

This misalignment causes teachers to feel frustrated because they are pulled in what they perceive as opposite directions. If tests are multiple-choice and disconnected from the curriculum, then it appears that rote memorization and basic skills are valued and the curriculum should focus on what is covered on the test. On the other hand, if such assessments are primarily performance assessments, then the message is that higher order thinking skills and application of knowledge are important and the curriculum should focus on the breadth and depth of knowledge defined by the district's standards and benchmarks.

When the various levels of assessment are aligned, then the system is functioning as intended. What the state and district say they value as defined by standards is what is assessed. The information schools and students receive about students' performance is related to what students have been told are the learning targets. Schools and students know where they stand in relation to meeting standards.

When the various levels are not aligned, the system shows signs of dysfunction. Teachers feel frustrated, pressured, and resentful. They may narrow the curriculum to cover only what is on the test and squander valuable learning time preparing students for a once-a-year event that is out of step with what standards say is important for students to learn. Schools, students, or both receive information about students' performance that may be unrelated to what students are to learn as defined by standards. The assessments are not useful in helping teachers or students know how students are performing in relation to standards.

Accountability — Intention vs. Reality

One purpose of accountability in a standards-based system is to determine if students are achieving standards. The party accountable for student learning varies across states. Sometimes it is districts and schools. Other times it is individual teachers or students. In some cases all of these players are held accountable, to some degree. There is disagreement about who should be held accountable and whether or not it is fair to hold teachers accountable for student learning when all of the factors that affect that learning are not in teachers' control. Andrew Porter suggests that accountability should be symmetric. "Students should be held accountable for their academic performance – but schools and teachers also should be accountable for that same performance" (Lockwood, 1999, p. 2).

Ideally, an accountability system can contribute positively to the overall functioning of a standards-based system. It can "help schools, districts, and states clearly articulate their bottom lines, the conditions that are needed in order to achieve those goals, and the consequences that all parties should expect" (Secada, 1999, p. 29). Unfortunately, there are many pitfalls, including measures that are not aligned with valued student outcomes and teaching practices, a lack of resources to establish the conditions necessary for students to achieve learning targets, and sanctions (e.g., technical assistance to low-performing schools) that are meaningless or disruptive because "sometimes people just don't know what to do. No matter how hard they try, they can't do it adequately" (Lockwood, 1999, p. 3).

Teachers' comments about state and district accountability often reflected these problems, especially misaligned or misused measures of assessment. Although both norm- and criterion-referenced assessments that are aligned with the standards-based curriculum can make a positive contribution to the accountability system, the ways in which the results of these assessments are used or reported often cause teachers to have strong negative reactions to accountability requirements.

Teachers we interviewed consider norm-referenced tests that do not align with the standards-based curriculum to be unfair forms of accountability that have negative consequences for

instruction. "All these tests are doing," said one teacher, "is showing teachers how to teach to the test." Most teachers, she continued, are simply intimidated by norm-referenced tests.

> *. . .there needs to be a clear connection between the design of the external accountability system and the standards that students are to meet.*

Similarly, teachers in the Philadelphia study (Simon et al., 1998) emphasized that there needs to be a clear connection between the design of the external accountability system and the standards that students are to meet.

Without this clear connection, teachers may end up merely "teaching to the test." The Philadelphia study, in fact, found that "for most teachers, satisfying what they perceived to be the demands of the test took priority over or were [*sic*] equated with the standards" (p. 32). Teachers, the report found, often referred more to the standardized tests than to the standards when talking about expectations for what students should know.

The issue of teaching to the test is so prevalent that it has caught the attention of the popular news media, as seen in an article from *USA Today* (November 1, 2000):

> Teachers increasingly are "teaching to the test." Typically, this means that teachers focus on materials that will be on an exam and to varying degrees exclude instruction in other subjects. Educators disagree on whether this practice is wrong. Some argue that teaching to the test is the only way to teach the skills and knowledge outlined in state and national education standards. But many education organizations take issue with the practice, including the National Education Association and the National School Boards Association (NSBA). The NSBA believes that teaching to the test narrows students' skills and their use of information. It argues that students should be encouraged to think creatively and solve problems, and such skills often are not measured by tests. (p. 8D)

When this article was posted on a listserv sponsored by the National Institute for Community Innovations, it elicited several responses that characterize how many teachers feel about the issue:

> I can't help but comment. The last sentence was the most salient. The solution is to align the tests to our standards, not stop teaching to the test. I worry we're throwing the baby out with the bathwater. (retrieved from ra-equity listserv, 11/15/00)

> Tests are driving the curriculum all over the nation. We are losing valuable and creative teachers over this. (retrieved from ra-equity listserv, 11/16/00)

As noted in the *USA Today* article, there is disagreement about the practice of teaching to the test. Table 1 presents some of the arguments on each side.

Since high stakes are attached to norm-referenced standardized tests, the problem of narrowing the curriculum is particularly severe. When asked how these tests influence instruction, one teacher strongly voiced her concern:

Table 1
Teaching to the Test
Arguments "For" and "Against"

For	Against
Teaching to the test and teaching the test are two different things. If a teacher is teaching to the test and doing good teaching that enhances learning, what's wrong with that?	In response to high-stakes tests, many schools substitute test-prep materials for the regular curriculum – mostly in minority students' classrooms. These test-prep materials have little, if any, value beyond practicing for the tests. Scores go up, but the quality of education goes down.
If the test measures what students are supposed to learn, then teaching to the test is the best thing to do.	Accountability is based on multiple-choice, standardized tests that require memorization and regurgitation. These tests do not cover large chunks of state standards, and things that aren't tested probably aren't taught.
Teaching to the test is fine, as long as students are learning good, valuable skills and important content knowledge.	Many states use "off-the-shelf" tests to hold schools accountable without considering whether the test measures the state's most important academic standards.
Teachers should be teaching to the test if the test requires students to use higher-order thinking skills and problem solving.	Teaching to the test throttles teacher creativity and encourages cheating.

Note: From *Research Into Practice Series: Implementing Standards in the Classroom* (p. F-2.6), by R. Marzano, P. Mayeski, and C. Dean, 2000, Aurora, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.

> Oh it's awful. I would have to say that [such tests] influence instruction even more than content standards.

When the norm-referenced tests are not closely aligned to standards, the pressure to perform well, she said, sends mixed messages to teachers. And she, for one, would like to get a clear sense from administrators of which is more important – preparing students for material on standardized tests or meeting standards. Her frustration is echoed in the comments of another teacher who said she would like to make the following statement to administrators:

> You're asking me to test two different ways that involve teaching two separate ways. Which one do you want me to do? I can do one or the other really well, but I can't do both of them really well [at the same time].

Statewide tests often lead to teachers becoming disenchanted with standards-based education and, in some cases, teaching.

Despite recognition by many teachers and administrators that their standards and high-stakes tests cross purposes in the classroom, many districts are unwilling to stop using standardized tests or to downplay their results. One teacher said she feels she is being pulled in opposite directions, especially when she hears comments from her administrators like, "Well, those running

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records are nice, but the top priority is the SAT 9." She feels that political pressure is driving the overemphasis on standardized tests.

When asked her greatest fear regarding standardized testing for accountability, one teacher spoke with passion about her students:

> I'm afraid that kids are going to be pushed when they're not ready because there is so much pressure. You can't compare my kids, who are lucky to make it to school on a daily basis, to the students from [another school] that is in a very affluent neighborhood. But I'm being told to do that.

Another unintended consequence of statewide assessment of standards is the effect on teachers' sense of their freedom to be creative. Statewide tests often lead to teachers becoming disenchanted with standards-based education and, in some cases, teaching. Said one Colorado teacher:

> What we're going to see is people teaching strictly to the test. When this happens, you really lose some of the flair and creativity. I was just talking to somebody last night, who said, "I don't get to have fun with my kids any more because all I can concentrate on are the CSAP [Colorado Student Assessment Program] tests and making sure they do well on those."

Many educators complained that state-level accountability systems are not directly connected to classroom learning objectives and that they unnecessarily distract from the learning process. Such systems often encourage mistrust among teachers, who fear the assessment results will be used unfairly to impose sanctions on low-scoring schools. The ideal approach to standards-based reform, teachers said, is to develop an accountability system that interacts in a meaningful way with instruction.

Although most comments were related to state-level accountability, some teachers also had concerns about district-level accountability. For example, one teacher cited her district's accountability process as a significant distraction

to the effective implementation of standards in her classroom. In her district, teachers are required to assess students' literacy skills using specific assessments at certain times to determine how well students are performing related to the district's standards and whether they are ready to progress to the next level. This requires a great

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deal of paperwork. She felt that this emphasis on assessment for accountability was misplaced and not a good way to hold teachers accountable:

> The district has decided that it is more important for me to take a #2 pencil and bubble in every single thing that I have done for every student in triplicate. That's how they're holding me accountable.

There were many concerns about the fairness of holding teachers accountable for student learning. For example, teacher and parent focus group participants in a study conducted by the Education Commission of the States (1996) agreed that "there are too many factors outside educators' control to hold teachers fully responsible for student achievement" (p. 5). They cited violence, lack of funding, inadequate materials and technology, overcrowding, inadequate staffing, and behavioral disturbances due to emotional and domestic problems as other factors that influence student performance. Said one Maryland teacher:

> There are too many variables. Are the children coming to school? Are the parents holding them to doing their work? Nowadays people move every year. How can you hold the school accountable for children you just received? (p. 13)

Another teacher we interviewed emphasized the lack of fairness that surrounds an accountability system that has consequences for teachers relative to implementing standards:

> How are you going to show that this teacher is utilizing standards better than the other one when the makeup of your class is totally different from year to year? I might have 30 of my students pass and master all these standards, where another teacher might be good and still using the standards but have 20 students pass.

Some Positive Aspects of Accountability

Although most of the teachers we interviewed had complaints, or at least concerns, about accountability, some teachers said that having external accountability in the form of policy statements and expectations for achieving standards encourages implementation at the classroom level. At a Missouri high school, for example, one teacher reported that educators take standardized testing very seriously, at least in part because of a connection to funding. "Part of our state funding is determined by how well our students do on that [standardized test]," she said. "And so, it's definitely important to us." More important, she added, when teachers take the tests more seriously, students tend to do so as well.

In at least one school, accountability means that student progress is tracked carefully. As a result, more students are reaching proficiency on standards. Every semester, teachers select specific curriculum outcomes for their classes, assign project-based assessments, and enter students' scores for these assessments in a computer file.

That way, school administrators can see whether teachers are keeping track of students' performance. Teachers are evaluated on how well they follow this procedure. The evaluation, however, is productive, not punitive. For example, the principal may ask teachers whether they plan to change the focus of their instruction based on their students' performance or whether they feel the assessments are valid. "If you have some students who can't do something," said one teacher, "you know it wasn't a good thing to ask them to do. Maybe it wasn't very well planned. . . to start with." This teacher appreciated the supportive approach that her administrators took.

The new forms of assessment and accountability that have accompanied standards-based education are intended to help improve the quality of education for all students. As with all human systems, there are flaws that need to be addressed, and there are some who view the system as harsh or unfair. In many cases, however, the intent of the assessment and accountability system is realized: Resources are targeted where they can do the most good, teachers have better information about their students' level of knowledge and use this information to adjust instruction, and assistance is provided to low-scoring schools with positive results. Clearly there are good reasons that Andrew Porter said, "Accountability for student achievement could be with us for a long time" (Lockwood, 1999, p. 5).

CHAPTER 5

SUPPORTING TEACHERS' IMPLEMENTATION OF STANDARDS-BASED EDUCATION

Change is always challenging. It represents moving from a familiar and often comfortable mode of operation to a less familiar and perhaps uncomfortable one. As simply stated by one teacher, "Change is hard." For teachers, the challenge of implementing standards-based education is to move from their current comfort zone to feeling overwhelmed to feeling confident about their ability to help all students acquire the knowledge specified by standards. To meet this challenge, teachers need support in a variety of forms.

District and school leaders can do a number of things to help make the change to standards-based education easier for teachers. Specifically, they can support teachers by clearly communicating the changes that standards-based education will entail and their support for them, pacing the progress of reform, providing structures and opportunities for teachers to learn the knowledge and skills to implement standards, aligning other aspects of the system (e.g., time, technology, and teacher evaluation) with the goals of standards-based education, assisting with support of failing students, and helping to make needed resources available.

Chapter Summary

School leaders must be invested in and optimistic about standards-based reform in order for it to succeed. Expectations of teachers need to be clear and reasonable, and teachers need to be given the resources they need to meet them. Collaborative efforts between teachers and ample professional development opportunity can go a long way toward successful implementation.

Communicating Commitment to Standards-Based Education

Leaders of the change effort must ensure that their words and actions are consistent and that they project a positive attitude toward the change to standards-based education. One teacher whose

principal supported implementation at her school emphasized the difference this attitude can make:

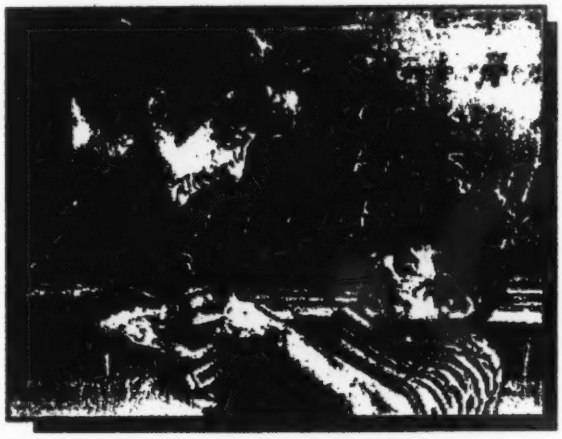
> Where you don't have strong leadership at the top pushing for standards. . . the standards movement is not quite as strong in those buildings. There are still principals in our district who [project the attitude that] this will go by the wayside just like other educational things do.

Another teacher said, "An upbeat approach [on administrators' part] encourages a positive response from teachers." She added that whether the message is coming from the district or building leadership, it should be a message of encouragement that acknowledges that teachers are capable professionals, that some aspects of the new approach are already in place, and that students will benefit from the change:

> I think it has to be presented as, "You can do this. You're doing it already; it's not one more thing to do. It's good for kids. The expectation is that you do it."

Other teachers also mentioned the importance of having leaders who let them know that implementing standards is an essential part of being able to work at a school. It helps to view reform as a regular expectation of what one does, said one teacher, "Much like you come to work on time, you take attendance. This is what we do here. If your expectations are high, then you will have higher production."

Leaders need to be sure that their expectations are clear and reasonable and teachers understand the amount and type of change expected in a given time period (Organized Change, 2000). Otherwise, teachers may become confused, frustrated, and unwilling to participate in the change to standards-based education.



Pacing the Progress of Reform

Another way for leaders to support teachers throughout the shift to standards-based education is to monitor, evaluate, and adjust the pace of the process to ensure that too much change doesn't occur too quickly. If teachers are feeling overwhelmed and no one seems to notice or to relieve the burden, then the trust needed to sustain the effort could erode and teachers might become cynical. As a result, there could be a tendency to undermine the reform.

Nancy Sanders, director of research at McREL, suggests one way that change can be implemented

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at a reasonable pace. The approach she describes increases teachers' competence in implementing standards successfully in their classrooms:

> Let teachers phase in their understanding subject by subject, focusing on one at a time. . . This means even experienced teachers must step back and give up some of the more advanced or complex units they are used to teaching and identify the essential knowledge. Working in groups, for example a grade-level team, teachers select one content area and decide which benchmarks are most important to work toward during the year. Then, the group tries out various activities related to the benchmarks and comes back together to discuss their effectiveness, modifying them as needed. They continue the process until there's agreement on what they're looking for from kids.
>
> Once teachers are comfortable with the process, they can incorporate the knowledge in the benchmarks into more complex units – although, when they begin to organize their curriculum around standards, the way it is put together may be different. The form might be quite different. . . This process is a good way to get all teachers involved in implementing standards.

Sanders emphasizes that it is important for teachers to work together to understand what standards require of students, to design lessons to teach standards, and to develop assessments to determine if students are meeting standards. Working together not only provides teachers with support and a wider set of experiences from which to learn, but it also creates a greater sense of investment in the process of implementing standards-based reform.

Providing Structures and Opportunities for Teacher Learning

From interviews with teachers, it is clear that they agree with Sanders about the importance of working with their colleagues to implement standards. As one teacher said, "People must work together even more because you can't do this [standards approach] alone." When another teacher was asked what most helped her move from her old way of teaching to standards-based teaching, she emphasized the necessity of a support network, a "cadre of teachers" with whom to share ideas, frustrations, and successes. "You know," she said, "when you work with a team, so much more can be produced of better quality. You feed off each other; you learn from each other."

Working together not only provides teachers with support and a wider set of experiences from which to learn, but it also creates a greater sense of investment in the process of implementing standards-based reform.

There are a number of ways that district and school leaders can help teachers receive the support they need from their peers. For example, they can provide opportunities for teachers to visit their colleagues' classrooms to observe how they

use standards to guide curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In addition, once teachers have seen how new instructional and assessment methods can be used, they can provide opportunities for teachers to practice these methods and receive feedback on how well they are using them.

To provide these and other opportunities for teacher learning, leaders should set up structures (e.g., grade-level teams, curriculum task forces, cross-grade teams) and provide other resources (e.g., time and materials). Simply having structures, however, is not enough. The activities that occur in these groups also are important. Wilson and Ball (1996) suggest that these groups focus on developing core teaching practices, such as the curriculum design work described by Sanders in the previous section. Sparks and Hirsh (2000) emphasize that in order for teachers to relate standards-based education to classroom practices, professional development must focus on their day-to-day classroom work. This means that professional development should engage teachers in activities that allow them to answer questions such as, *What lesson plans will help students reach proficiency on a particular standard? How will I know each student has become proficient? How will I document student achievement?*

"Much of what passes for professional development is only marginally related to what is known about improving student learning."

Further, Sparks and Hirsch (2000) assert, professional development should have the following characteristics:

> . . .all staff members are engaged in sustained, intellectually rigorous study of what they teach and how they teach it. . . .Departments [should] have common planning time so teachers can study the standards together, create more powerful lessons with their peers, practice and share new teaching methods, and solve problems collaboratively. (p. 11)

As stated previously, the change to standards-based education is complex; therefore, there is much for teachers to learn. In order to learn it, they need an effective professional development program. District and school leaders should guide the development and implementation of a coherent and comprehensive professional development plan that will help teachers acquire the knowledge and skills needed to align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state and local standards.

Unfortunately, according to the Education Commission of the States (1997), "Much of what passes for professional development is only marginally related to what is known about improving student learning" (p. 1). In addition, professional development programs are often a series of disconnected activities, making it difficult in many cases for teachers to understand how or if the activities are related to implementing standards-based education.

Sparks and Hirsh (2000) blame the failure of many professional development programs on "one-shot workshops and school-wide presentations of new methods that lack connections to the challenges teachers face in the classroom" (p. 4). The authors continue, "This status quo is especially alarming at a time when standards are raising demands for what teachers and students should know and be able to do" (p. 4).

Fortunately, there are schools and districts whose professional development programs can serve as models for helping teachers acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve student learning. Several of these are winners of the U.S. Department of Education's National Award for Model Professional Development. The winners of this award exemplify the Principles of Effective Professional Development (see Table 2) developed by the department. These principles can be used to create a professional development plan to help teachers acquire the knowledge and skills they need to implement standards.

Embedded in these principles is recognition of teachers as learners. Like any other learners, teachers learn best when they are not tired or distracted by a myriad of other tasks and when they are actively engaged in learning that is relevant to their work. Formal professional development sessions that are "sit-and-get," take place on a teacher's own time, or occur at the end of a long workday are definitely not designed for success (Dean & Mayeski, 1997).

Table 2
Principles of Effective Professional Development

Effective professional development
• Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community; • Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement; • Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community; • Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership; • Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content; teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards; • Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools; • Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development; • Is driven by a coherent, long-term plan; and • Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and students learning, and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.

Note. from *Missions and Principles of Professional Development*, U.S. Department of Education, 1995.

These principles also demonstrate that the concept of professional development has expanded from isolated, beginning-of-the-year, formal training sessions to an initial training session followed by a series of formal and informal follow-up learning opportunities spread throughout the year. A WestEd report (2000) describes nearly 40 of the informal ways to learn identified by winners of the National Award for Model Professional Development (see Table 3). The list includes everything from conversing with colleagues and working through conflicts to conducting trial-and-error experiments and sharing new knowledge acquired at conferences. Teachers interviewed by WestEd stressed that although formal professional development activities set the stage, it is through informal personal exchanges that new ideas take root, spread, and become part of daily practice, which develops crucial habits of collegial sharing that characterize award-winning schools.

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Without support for teacher learning, it is not likely that there will be significant improvements in student learning.

A long-time middle school teacher interviewed about the need for informal professional development emphasized that formal presentations are best for sharing the philosophy of the standards approach and generating teacher support, while collaborative activities such as sharing lesson plans and record-keeping methods are the best way to learn the day-to-day details of implementation. "We are our best resource in terms of implementing standards in the classroom," she declared. "Having someone come out and talk to you isn't as powerful as having your colleague show you a lesson that he or she actually taught. If we just look at what others are doing, there are people doing really fine work we can learn from."

Table 3
Informal Learning Structures Identified by Teachers

Analyzing student performance	Planning the budget
Attending content-area meetings	Planning with grade-level team
Being observed by other teachers	Reading articles and books
Coaching	Serving as a peer evaluator
Conducting action research	Serving on committees
Conducting trial-and-error experiments	Serving on a leadership team
Conversing with colleagues	Sharing from conferences
Creating student learning activities	Solving problems
Creating teacher portfolios	Studying student work
Designing curriculum	Supervising a student teacher, intern or teaching assistant
Implementing new ideas	Traveling
Interacting with visiting professors	Visiting other schools
Making decisions	Watching videotapes
Mentoring	Working on classroom, school, district or community projects
Observing other teachers	Working through conflicts
Observing students	Writing action plans
Organizing educational initiatives	Writing for professional publications
Participating in meetings	Writing grants
Participating in self-studies	

Note: From *Teachers Who Learn, Kids Who Achieve* (p.23), by WestEd, 2000, San Francisco, CA: Author. Reprinted with permission.

A Missouri high school teacher also credited both formal and informal learning opportunities for moving her along the standards-based education learning curve. She said state and district representatives spoke to teachers and administrators at her school several times over a period of four to five years as content standards were being introduced and phased into the district curriculum. Teachers actually helped define content standards in those early days, which generated their support and understanding throughout the process.

These formal presentations were helpful in the early stages, but informal learning with colleagues became more important as implementation progressed. As this teacher said, "Later on, when you get down to the nitty gritty, you have to have time to talk to people." This long-time educator, who praised her district's history of strong professional development, said teachers were paid for additional days during which they participated in formal training sessions early in the process. Most informal, collaborative work, however, took place on teachers' own time.

There are many skills for teachers to learn if they are to successfully shift to a standards-based system. Thinking of them as learners during the shift to standards-based education is perhaps the most important form of support. Without support for teacher learning, it is not likely that there will be significant improvements in student learning.

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Aligning Teacher Evaluation with Standards-Based Education

Leaders can further reinforce the district's and school's commitment to standards-based education by evaluating teachers on how well they align curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards. Aligning the teacher evaluation system with standards-based education sets the expectation that teachers will implement standards in ways that support student learning. Table 4 is a rubric that administrators can use to evaluate teachers in a system where the focus is on gathering evidence of student learning. Proficient teachers in this system monitor student learning in multiple ways throughout the day and adjust instruction accordingly. They effectively collaborate with their colleagues to examine student work, which leads to deeper understanding of student learning and their own teaching.

Support When Students Aren't Meeting Standards

Support is important when teachers are beginning to implement standards, but it is absolutely critical when teachers have been teaching to standards and the measures of student achievement indicate that many students are not meeting standards.

When a school does not meet performance expectations, the response of leadership can have either a negative or positive effect on the future performance of the school. It's more helpful when leaders talk about how they can help a school improve, said one teacher, "as opposed to [saying] 'if you don't get better, you're really in trouble.'" Teachers find it most productive when administrators say, "What do you need to get better? Do you have the supplies you need? Do you have the training?"

Table 4
Rubric for Evaluating Teachers on Adjusting Instruction to Enhance Student Learning

Rating	Description
4	• Consistently participates in and leads discussions of possible adjustments that could be made in the learning opportunities offered to individual students or to groups of students in order to enhance their learning. • Provides leadership in finding and developing ways of thoroughly understanding the reasons for deficiencies or the explanations of the insufficient challenges. • Pursues diverse and creative ideas for providing additional or alternative opportunities to students in order to increase their learning. • Provides leadership in groups that are collecting and analyzing data to ensure that data collection efforts are efficient and focused and that conclusions are valid.
3	• Consistently participates in and contributes to discussions of possible adjustments that could be made in the learning opportunities offered to individual students or to groups of students in order to enhance their learning. • Offers and considers possible reasons for students' learning deficiencies or explanations of the insufficient challenges. • Offers and considers ideas for adjusting students' learning experiences in order to enhance their learning.
2	• Sometimes participates in and contributes to discussions of possible adjustments that could be made in the learning opportunities offered to individual students or to groups of students in order to enhance their learning. • Acknowledges some possible reasons for students' learning deficiencies or explanations of insufficient challenges. • Accepts some ideas offered for adjusting students' learning deficiencies or explanations of insufficient challenges.
1	• Rarely participates in and reluctantly contributes to discussions of possible adjustments that could be made in the learning opportunities offered to individual students or to groups of students in order to enhance their learning. • Dismisses possible reasons for students' learning deficiencies or explanations of insufficient challenges. • Usually accepts only those reasons that place all responsibility on the student and/or resists others' ideas for adjusting students' learning experiences in order to enhance students' learning.

States also can take a positive approach by offering technical assistance and other resources to support schools where large numbers of students are not achieving standards. In North Carolina, for example, practicing teachers and school administrators, along with retired

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educators and college professors on loan to the state department of public instruction, formed assistance teams for schools performing poorly on state assessments. These five-member teams received extensive special training, then were assigned to a single school for full-time, year-long assistance. The teams

- Assessed discrepancies between school practices and the state's Effective Schools Correlates;
- Drew up an improvement plan;
- Monitored individualized teacher improvement plans;
- Aligned school curriculum with the expected standards;
- Revised master schedules of teachers to allow more instructional time;
- Provided teachers with guidance on lesson plan development and implementation, behavior management, and classroom organization;
- Established frequent student assessments; and
- Coached teachers on how to adjust instruction and plans to devote more instructional time to students who needed it. (Regional Educational Laboratory Network, 1998a, p. 3)

Teachers find it most productive when administrators say, "What do you need to get better?"

This type of extensive technical assistance provides the kind of support teachers need to enable them to improve their teaching, the climate for learning, and ultimately, students' performance.

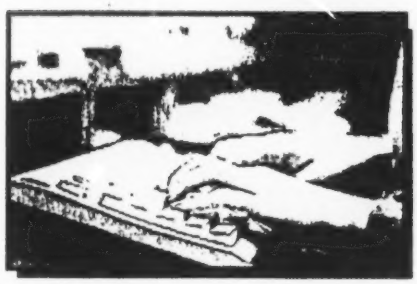
Providing Time and Other Resources

As mentioned previously, in a standards-based system all elements are aligned to support students in meeting standards. District and school leaders must be certain to examine district policies to determine if they do indeed support standards implementation. In a recent study, for example, teachers trying to create standards-based classrooms said they needed smaller class sizes, clearer discipline policies, higher salaries, better reading programs, and alignment of curricula with standards (Bradley, Hoff, & Manzo, 1999).

Technology is another important support for standards-based education for at least three reasons. First, it can help teachers design instruction that allows diverse students to actively engage in learning in ways that may be easier or more meaningful to them than lectures, textbooks, or other modes. Students can also use technology to demonstrate that they have acquired a deep understanding of content. Second, technology is an easy way to keep people informed and connected to one another, especially when there is an expectation that people will use technology for this purpose. For example, in one school, all teachers receive bulletins via district and school e-mail. This flow of information "forces people to check [their e-mail regularly]," said this teacher. Third, technology helps lighten the burden of tracking student progress. In some cases, as in this teacher's school, teachers use technology to enter and submit traditional grades. In others, however, teachers are tracking student progress in

meeting individual standards and benchmarks. Given the number of benchmarks in most districts, this task could quickly become overwhelming without the help of technology.

Although most teachers have at least some experience with technology, the shift to standards-based education requires that many learn how to use technology effectively for instruction and record keeping. As one teacher said, "Computers are. . . an essential part of being able to work. You have to be able to use those, at least minimally, or you can't do what you have to do."



Although all the supports mentioned thus far are important, time seems to be the most important one to teachers. To them, support means providing the time needed to learn and accomplish what needs to be done. This means time must be available to review materials and to understand the implications they have for curriculum design and instruction. Time to "select, adapt, or develop curricular materials that are aligned with the standards framework" (Simon et al., 1998, p. 60) also is essential.

Teachers we interviewed said they need more time to develop an understanding of what standards-based education means. As one teacher said, "We need time to just look at standards books and digest what's there." Teachers also want time to work with colleagues to develop their own implementation strategies. Time for such collaboration often requires flexible scheduling, however, which can be difficult to achieve in some schools.

School and district leaders can provide teachers with time for learning by assigning substitute teachers, teacher assistants, student teachers, or interns to temporarily relieve teachers in the classroom. Another option is to add a few minutes to each school day in order to accumulate enough time for a day or half-day of professional development. Some schools and districts use the time accumulated in this way to institute "early-release" or "late-start" days for students so teachers have time for formal or informal collaboration and professional development. Others arrange for students to attend special sessions in art, music, physical education, or computer training while core subject-area teachers participate in professional development activities.

...support means providing the time needed to learn and accomplish what needs to be done.

Schools with award-winning professional development programs often find that making better use of available meeting time is just as important as carving out additional time. For example, a report by WestEd (2000) maintains that, "rather than squandering faculty meetings on routine information that can be communicated through newsletters or e-mail, principals and teachers use this time to focus collaboratively on the 'real work' of teaching" (p. 33).

Leaders have an important role to play in helping teachers implement standards. They must create the opportunities and provide time for teachers to build their understanding of how to design and use curriculum, instruction, and assessments that help students achieve standards. They must also monitor how staff members are progressing with standards, determine the supports necessary to facilitate their progress, and then seek to provide them. It's also important for leaders to acknowledge teachers' frustrations with standards-implementation and provide ample opportunities for in-depth discussions about all aspects of standards-based education, in particular its philosophy and goals. Leaders should share stories of success – not only because these stories provide proof that the effort is worth it, but also because they provide concrete examples of how standards can be implemented. These stories help teachers develop a good grasp of what standards are all about in terms of teaching and learning.

CHAPTER 6

NEXT STEPS: ON THE TRAIL TO A MIDCOURSE REVIEW

Standards-based education is a system of education built around statements of what students should know and be able to do. Although the definition may be simple, the shift to such a system is not. The frustration, confusion, anger, and stress expressed by many teachers that we interviewed are to be expected when the change they are being asked to undertake is so complex. They cannot stop their normal routine to focus all of their energies on learning the new way. They must deal simultaneously with parts of the old system and parts of the new and the turmoil and uncertainty of transition. Despite the frustrations, there are signs of hope for those who persevere. They are seeing the benefits of standards-based education and reaping rewards for themselves and their students.

Those both for and against standards-based education–like teachers in this monograph–are concerned about the gap between "what we know we should be doing and what we are doing" (Riley, 2000). As Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association and a supporter of higher expectations for students, said, "We have to make sure that the implementation activities of the standards movement don't kill the movement" (Olson, 2000, p. 1).

Given the misunderstandings and difficulties with implementation, it is clear that many people are still trying to figure out what standards-based education is all about and how to implement it. U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley acknowledged the frustration

Chapter Summary

The stakes are high. Clearly there is much work to be done for the promise of standards-based education to be realized. A national dialogue is a first step in this midcourse review.

and confusion that surrounds standards in his February 2000 state of education speech when he urged that we take stock of the standards movement:

We are at a critical juncture in raising standards. As standards move from the statehouse to the schoolhouse, the debate is growing louder. While some of the debate reflects opposition to higher standards and stronger accountability, much of it is occurring because there is a gap between what we know we should be doing and what we are doing.

This is the first time all 50 states have ever tried something so ambitious, so it is important that we have a 'midcourse' review and analysis to make sure everybody understands what the standards movement is all about. So, let me suggest some guiding principles.

The first principle: have a healthy and ongoing dialogue with parents and teachers. The fact that people are talking about how to implement challenging standards is a good sign. However, in some cases, this seems to be a one-way conversation and that's a mistake. The ultimate success of this effort depends on our teachers and principals and it requires us to go the extra mile to make sure that parents understand and support their efforts. State leaders and educators need to listen hard to concerns. Involve the entire community and avoid a "here's the test" top-down approach of putting assessments in place. . .

I urge leaders at every level to take stock of where they are and where they are going when it comes to implementing standards.

Focus of the Midcourse Review

For the last decade, McREL has provided leadership in standards-based education. As a leader in the field, McREL has begun to make plans to conduct a midcourse review and analysis of standards-based education, as suggested by Secretary Riley. In early 2000, McREL staff members who conduct research or provide technical assistance on standards-based education met with other educators from the central region to discuss the challenge of achieving the full potential of standards-based education. The group agreed that the challenge is rooted in the following issues:

1. There is little agreement about what standards-based education looks like, so research and evaluation studies report vast differences in approaches.
2. The push for high-stakes accountability tends to limit the scope of standards-based curriculum and instruction.
3. There is not a clear, comprehensive system of alignment between standards and benchmarks and among local, state, and national standards.

4. Teachers do not have access to high-quality instructional resources that are aligned with local standards.
5. The assessment and record-keeping requirements for standards-based education place burdens on teachers.
6. There is limited information about standards-based approaches that can address the learning requirements of all students, especially students who do not meet standards.
7. More information is needed about the costs of implementing standards; support to cover the costs also is needed.

We suggest that a reasonable strategy for carrying out a midcourse review of standards-based education is to evaluate the progress made in relation to these issues and to facilitate dialogue about the current status of the movement and how to realize its full potential.

Gather Information About the Current Status of Reform

In order to refine and continue the standards-based education movement, we need to have a good sense of what has been accomplished to date. The first step in the midcourse review, then, is to review the existing literature and research. The issues listed previously are a good beginning point for asking questions about progress made:

- To what extent is there a common understanding about standards-based education that could focus research about what works?
- What knowledge and skills are tested on state assessments? What are the models of state accountability systems that appropriately determine if students are meeting standards without causing teachers to narrow the curriculum?
- What are models for aligning standards at the local, state, and national levels?
- How do teachers find and use instructional materials to help students meet standards?
- What are effective instructional practices that help students meet standards in the various content areas?
- What are effective ways to assess and track students' achievement of standards?
- What effects have different approaches to standards-based education had on students with special needs?
- What are effective ways to increase learning opportunities for students who do not meet standards?
- What do effective approaches to standards-based education cost in terms of time, money, and public patience?

Facilitate Dialogue

After gathering information about the progress of the standards movement, we believe it is important to facilitate thoughtful conversation about how to use standards to effectively promote reform. This dialogue would bring together a range of stakeholders to discuss (a) the

importance of refining and continuing the standards-based reform movement now underway; (b) how to act upon research-based leadership, training, and classroom practices that have shown promise in increasing the achievement of all learners; and (c) how to encourage each stakeholder group (e.g., educators, parents, community members, policymakers, and students) to share responsibility for improving student achievement.

There have been many opportunities – conferences, panels, position papers, and reports – to talk about standards and education. How is this dialogue different? First, because the conversation is being defined as a dialogue rather than a discussion, diverse stakeholders will have the opportunity to examine the knowledge base about standards-based education, gain insight, explore choices, and engage in shared inquiry about standards and education. Second, dialogue allows participants not only to talk together but also to think together – a critical element that has been missing from discussions of standards-based education. By thinking together, participants in the dialogue can go beyond the surface level of most discussions. For example, parents and teachers can reflect on why individual children succeed and fail; teachers and administrators can explore the underlying concepts and values that should guide their practice; and policymakers will have opportunities to develop a shared, deep understanding of standards and education with all stakeholders in the education system. In addition, the general public will have an opportunity to share in the inquiry about standards and education.

The dialogue about standards-based education will occur at all levels – national, regional, state, and local. These dialogues will be collaborative inquiries focused by the questions, *What have we learned about standards-based education and about reform?* and *Where should that knowledge take us next?* These forums will facilitate the sharing of success stories and best practice and provide stakeholders with opportunities to share underlying assumptions, beliefs, and research.

By doing so, they will develop a common understanding of how to address concerns about standards-based education, such as those raised by teachers quoted in this *Noteworthy*, revitalize the nation's public education system, and realize the overarching goal of the standards movement – to help all students achieve high standards.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Putnam Valley Central School: annotated list of K-12 education standards and curriculum frameworks documents.
http://PutnamValleySchools.org/standards.html

Improving America's Schools: A Newsletter on Issues in School Reform
www.ed.gov/pubs/IASA/newsletters/standards/pt1.html

Achieve's Standards Database: a searchable database of state and international academic standards in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, organized by subject, state, grade level, topic, and keyword.
www.achieve.org/

The Standards-Based Grade Book program: developed for people who are responsible for managing and reporting learning and performance on defined standards or benchmarks.
www.newgradebook.com/

APPENDIX

Milestones in Standards-based Reform

1983 – *A Nation at Risk* is published, calling for reform of the U.S. education system.

1987 – The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) writing teams begin to review curriculum documents and to draft standards for curriculum and evaluation.

1989 – At the first education summit, President Bush and the nation's fifty governors adopt the National Education Goals for the year 2000 which, among other provisions, call for national achievement standards in core subjects.

1990 – In his State of the Union address, President Bush announces the National Education Goals for the year 2000; shortly thereafter, he and Congress establish a National Education Goals Panel.

1991 – The National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST) is established. The purpose of NCEST is to advise on the desirability and feasibility of voluntary national standards.

1994 – President Clinton signs into law Goals 2000: Educate America Act. Among other provisions, this legislation creates the National Education Standards and Improvement Council to certify national and state content and performance standards. Also, U.S. history standards are released.

1995 – The New Standards Project releases a three-volume "consultation draft" entitled Performance Standards for English language arts, mathematics, science and "applied learning."

1995 – McREL publishes *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education*, a synthesis of standards in all subject areas.

1996 – The second education summit is held. Forty state governors and more than 45 business leaders in attendance support efforts to set clear academic standards in the core subject areas at the state and local levels.

1996 – The National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association publish *Standards for the English Language Arts.*

1997 – President Clinton, in his State of the Union Address, calls for every state to adopt high national standards, and declares that "by 1999, every state should test every 4th grader in reading and every 8th grader in math to make sure these standards are met."

1997 – The National Center of Education and the Economy publishes Standards for Excellence in Education, which includes standards in science, history, geography, English language arts, mathematics, civics, foreign language, and the arts.

1999 – The National Education Summit is held. Governors, educators, and business leaders identify three key challenges facing U.S. schools – improving educator quality, helping all students reach high standards, and strengthening accountability – and agree to specify how each of their states would address these challenges.

2000 – Secretary Riley calls for a national dialogue on content standards during his *State of American Education* address. He urges states to undergo a "midcourse review" that brings together teachers, parents, principals, and business and community leaders to take stock of where they are and where they are going with standards implementation.